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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

DEATH WISH

BY



LORNA UHER

A THESIS

SUBMITTED TO THE FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH  
IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR THE DEGREE  
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THE UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

FACULTY OF GRADUATE STUDIES AND RESEARCH

The undersigned certify that they have read, and recommend to the Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research, for acceptance, a thesis entitled "Death Wish and Other Poems" submitted by Lorna Jean Uher in partial fulfilment of the requirements for the degree of Master of Arts.





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SHE MAKES ME BEAUTIFUL





1.

the worker she comes  
every six months  
i tell her  
my mouth is raw  
from eating soap  
my back bleeds  
from the strap

the foster father denies  
says "It was her last  
home/ those scars are  
also in her head"  
he smiles at the worker  
pats my shoulder with  
large hands they both  
are smiling she says  
"Be a good girl" drives away  
in a big black car

my heart beats  
like grouse drumming  
his smiling eyes  
are lizard's are glass  
his hand holds the strap  
dipped in the barrel  
that catches rain

i want to swallow myself  
whole



2.

i come home late from school  
afraid  
of the strap slow i pull  
the spool handle of screen door

he bangs my brother's  
head on the floor  
i try to yell stop  
stop  
try to call foster mother  
leaning against the sink  
but my words have broken  
wings  
their feathers smother  
my speaking

i become two people  
one watching  
the other grabbing the rifle  
that explodes rabbit and gopher  
heads i point cold metal  
at the father walking arm  
outstretched eyes smiling  
not believing "Give it here  
or I'll wrap it round your neck"

but my eyes see  
the blue strap  
hanging by the kitchen door  
see the brother's blood  
shiny pools on linoleum





i shoot the father  
shoot the mother the brother  
trapped on the floor  
by his teeth of fear

i become one person slowly  
moving together

as in snow moving  
towards the river



3.

(my ears stuffed  
with grass/ my tongue  
shrivelled like winter  
berries) the worker  
she talks leads me inside  
a building of bricks

doors close

father and mother and  
brother their spirits reach  
with long eyes to take me away  
but worker she grabs me  
says "No they're alive"  
and man with large hands  
holds me down

shut my eyes  
to their calling  
burrow deep into darkness  
only badger can find me  
dig me out



4.

when snow falls  
worker says "Time  
to find a job  
nothing here except  
in summer cleaning rooms"

bus goes fast  
trees are less and less  
land rolled flat  
by sun smashed by sky  
i feel scared like bush rabbit  
no place to hide





5.

at first i don't know  
lights at corners  
walk when hand is raised  
cars honk drivers shake  
fists and yell

at first i smile  
but faces are dead  
no one speaks  
i become silent as deer's  
breath in winter

at first i sit in parks  
by trees and rows of sparrows  
but they are not nice places  
bottles in bushes men  
who cough and stare

at first i don't know



6.

beer she comforts me  
she makes me  
remember words  
river pebbles in mouth  
makes everyone  
my friend  
makes me laugh

beer she makes me  
beautiful  
makes hair shine  
raven wings  
puts man's hand on  
warm thigh makes me  
ache nice between legs

beer she makes me  
laugh



7.

this scar see  
beadwork on my neck  
from ear to ear  
Marlene did it  
cause her man bought me  
beer nothing else  
no hand in pants  
just friendly like

right in front of the bar  
she jumped me  
slit my throat  
so easy it was blood  
steaming on snow like deer  
guts after the kill

i didn't tell no one  
who done it  
but when i got out of hospital  
i go to sporting store  
buy aluminum bat  
find Marlene on Rose Street  
smash her legs  
the sound of bat on bone  
like the whack of a home-  
run ball

when she gets out  
i'm gonna do it again





UNTO ALL LOVERS COURAGE



For, lyke as trees and erbys burgenyth and floryssshyth in May, in lyke wyse every lusty harte that ys ony maner of lover spryngith, burgenyth, buddyth, and floryssshyth in lusty dedis. For it gyvyth unto all lovers corrayge, that lusty moneth of May . . .

But nowadayes men can nat love sevensnyght but they muste have all their desyres. That love may nat endure by reson, for where they be the sone accorded and hasty, heete sone keelyth. And ryght so faryth the love nowadyaes, sone hote sone colde. Thys ys no stabylete.

-- Sir Thomas Malory



## MORGAIN LE FAY

From your beard and eyes  
I'll melt the ice  
when I let you in my bed  
but I'll also tell you  
of my other lovers  
    how they made me shiver  
    as they stroked my back  
    how they praised my breasts  
    with wet tongues

When you feel secure  
and fall asleep  
I'll suck the magic  
from between your legs  
seal your eyelids  
with water-clear stones  
Although you'll call out  
no one will hear  
You must lie in wait

Sometimes I'll appear  
in a changed form  
a crow snapping its beak  
above your eyes  
or a lithe white hound  
licking the crack of your ass  
Perhaps I'll be a serpent  
you must kiss  
before I writhe into a woman again

Seldom will I bring you joy  
The ripples from my stones  
will circle  
long after I have let you go





## THE TAMING OF THE UNICORN

Three mornings and nothing has happened.  
But today she hears a tongue lap water  
and hooves sink into sand.  
In her mirror she sees  
where they squat behind her  
silent as the tall grasses. Their faces  
frozen in glass: the betrothed, the father,  
the lover, the sun encircling  
his head like a noose.

A nose sniffs the hem of her skirt  
nuzzles her still, white hand.  
She wants to move, to frighten  
the animal back into the shadow  
but the warmth on her skin  
recalls the breath of her lover  
and the moist darkness of earth  
that will hold him  
if she fails.

She hums the *Woman's Song*  
learned in the hours of waiting,  
the hours of the hunt. She sings  
softly so the men won't hear, the song  
more subtle than the serpent's kiss.  
The unicorn lays his head across her lap.  
The white beard brushes her arm.  
His eyes, liquid as sun, become  
the centre of her twisting world.



She touches the horn once  
with the tips of her fingers follows  
the skein of light as it spirals  
before the men pin his legs and her father  
with one swift stroke lops off the head  
holds it triumphant  
above him (her face  
caught in the large dead eyes).



## FROM THE GARDEN I SEE HIM

He rides the horizon  
on a dusty thick-necked stallion  
Bottle raised in hand  
head thrown back and jeans  
hard as leather  
"My God," I cry  
"Save me from good men"

I gather my skirts and run  
but as I near  
the gelding flashes white  
the bottle is a shield and he  
pulls me up beside him  
rides me to mountains  
that slam the sky shut

There the horse turns hobby  
rocks in the garden wind  
and he picks hybrid roses  
to kill the smell of loving  
in our narrow bed





## THERE WILL BE NO CHILDREN

It twists in my flat belly, the head  
large enough to hold the eyes.  
Like the lioness I whelp,  
clean the mucous from the nose and mouth  
but you refuse  
to breathe into the blueing body. Small

as a fallen bird it dies  
in the far corner of your mind.  
The moist feathers on its back  
stick to the blood of its birth,  
and its tail coils like a serpent  
around your eye. You bury it

among gravestones the moon shapes  
into teeth in the earth's black mouth.  
I hear the sound of your shovel,  
the clawed foot scraping  
the shrunken womb.

It will be born again  
until you bury it in my bones.  
Inside my skull the wings beating  
like a pulse.



# THE LAST GIANT

When you climb the mountain  
to kill your last giant  
you leave me at the foot  
to praise  
as you ascend

(I am tired of battles  
Most years you are away  
and I fold into aging hide  
your children your wounds  
swallow them like darkness)

I cannot see beyond the trees  
but I hear the giant's roar  
the clatter of your weapons  
Your scream stones my eyes  
I see everything  
in pieces  
the trees the sun  
the shattered  
mountain

This is not the way  
it was to happen  
You are to be  
the hero of your own story  
the giant a devourer of maidens  
and baptized children

He did not ravish me  
as I trembled in the shadow  
of his bearded coat  
but laid your head gently  
in my lap



I tied it around  
the neck of my horse  
and bore it home  
hung it in the apple tree  
outside our window

Although you cannot see  
your tongue is now a blossom  
Wrens nest in  
                    the sockets of your eyes  
and sing the songs  
                    of your children  
dancing





## NIMUE

There are many versions

In the popular story  
I entice him into a cave  
and through magic devices  
roll away the sky with a big stone  
that even his charms  
cannot chip away

In another tale  
I persuade him to lie  
in a lovers' tomb  
to see if there's room  
for my bones beside him  
Then I coffin him in  
with a smile  
and a long stone slab

But the truth is

I have shrunk him  
carry him in my pocket  
a wizened man  
no bigger than a raisin  
He is not unhappy  
He dances on my palm  
light as an eyelash  
nests in my ear  
to whisper me the night



## MERLIN

In this time of beasts  
they copulate indiscriminately.  
Birds with bulls,  
snakes with dogs.  
The strangest beasts are  
born: an eagle's head  
joined with a lion's ass,  
ribs so huge and bent  
they are used for bowls,  
toenails so large  
they make cups  
to drink from.  
Beasts that cast  
a man's shadow.

And what have I done?  
Simply tried to seduce  
a water fairy,  
one perfect in her form.  
No fleshy wings, no scales,  
not a fish with feet  
but a maiden  
who rose from the water  
and the lake lay undisturbed--  
no storms portended--  
how was I to know?

She had no songs  
to break men on the rocks  
but smiled and nodded  
and smiled again  
when she asked me for my magic,  
promised favours in return



stroked my greying beard  
And I, the Devil's son, I  
who brought Uther Pendragon  
to his queen and caused the birth  
of Arthur; I, who foretold the sin  
that ruined a kingdom, moved boulders  
the Titans could not budge I  
laid low by a water maiden,  
a willow girl less important  
than my smallest hair.

Oh, that I were a winged bull  
to batter this stone with horns  
to blaze the sky  
until I find her  
pin her with my hooves  
mount her from behind  
snort and slobber  
sink my teeth into her shoulder  
the soft flesh . . . a sound  
on the other side of stone?

She often comes to listen  
where I rot in this damp hole.  
To her my tongue is but a leaf  
moved only by a frivolous wind  
that dies.

Nimue, I will sing  
the song of our golden daughters,  
our splendid sons,  
In this time of beasts  
our beautiful children  
cry to be born. Our beautiful



children cry.

It is no use.

Words swallow themselves in echoes.

Not a mermaid, but a maiden . . .

Her legs might as well have been joined,  
they did not part  
for me.





## COUPLE

Once I tried to feed you poisoned apples  
but you knew the trick, and gave them to

the birds that I had lured into my garden,  
the pattern of their wings beaten in the loam.

Once I stood above you with a knife but  
you awoke and swallowed the blade as if

it were a flake of chocolate, then kissed me  
with your sharp and silver tongue.

Under my pillow you found a gun, aimed it  
at my head, but it shot only blanks.

You had replaced the bullets the night before.  
Perhaps you swallowed them too,

and when you kiss me tonight, you'll fire one  
down my throat or through my breast.

I am afraid to go to bed.  
You are not to be trusted.



## LANCELOT

Too old to fight, too tired  
and where is the cause?  
The red sun falls.  
My sword is rust, my armour  
green, soft with moss. Still

the wounds speak, they sing  
of battles: horses and men  
rot in the vulture's shadow,  
faces are ribboned, flowers  
that are hands  
lie strewn on the fields.

Which memories to save?  
which memories to wipe  
these wounds away, like maggots  
eat them clean?

Friendship cannot bring me peace.  
Arthur, brother more than king,  
gave me his love like a jousting prize,  
placed the laurel on my head.  
I crowned him  
with a rack of horns.

Guinevere my lady brings no comfort.  
I saved her from burning  
drowned the flames in blood.  
Around the stake my friends,  
good knights, lay dead as wood  
to feed our fire.  
Guinevere . . . I could not see  
the serpents in her hair.



What memories?

The fair maid who nursed me  
into life, begged to be my wife,  
my paramour. I offered her  
a thousand pounds, the best knight  
I could find. Now dressed in white  
she drifts through my dark waters.  
A hunchback steersman guides her  
to the marriage bed. I pay  
mass-pennies for her soul  
while the cold pale lover  
unties her belt  
and takes her.

Which memories to save?

Which memories to staunch  
this blood? There is no healing.  
Age brings neither peace nor silence.  
The balsam tree is hacked by axes.  
The swan's death trumpet  
louder than the mourning dove.



RETURNING





"Could we go back  
To the old garden, we should not stay long;  
The fruit that we should find would all be fallen,  
And have the taste of earth."

--E. A. Robinson



1.

It is difficult to write  
of this return:

Dust settles in my throat  
Ditches are burnt black  
for grass and weeds  
grow too high/ will trap  
the snow and block  
the only road from town



2.

To drop into the past effortlessly  
To walk through the yard past rusted  
machinery-- gutted stoves and wringerless  
washers, and fall through rotted boards  
into the dry well, landing at the bottom  
soft as down



3.

The way back: the tracks ahead  
fill with snow a whiteness  
swallows the road  
and what is ahead or behind

I drive slowly but the right tires sink  
in the hidden ditch. The car leans  
into a death. I imagine  
my body's freezing, the thick  
skin like grapefruit rinds

I push and shovel  
claw, a maddened bird, until  
fingers numb, I sit in the car  
Darkness surrounds me with wings  
shadows in snow

I wait  
turn on the radio  
know he will come  
pull me out with his heavy chain  
pull me home





4.

We see breath clouds  
before the deer, sense warmth  
before movement

I will be breath  
melting the ice behind his eyes  
warming his throat  
with my speaking



5.

He has planted  
rows and rows of trees  
siberian elm black poplar caragana  
chokecherry spruce  
He has changed  
the shape of my sky



6.

When you were away

he says

the wind fell

Windows moved in and out

Shingles were crows in the wind

The caraganas were stripped

like sun-peeled skin

The spruce upended and our land

blew five miles down the road

That is why I moved the house

Now do you understand?



7.

Not even this body  
is familiar  
Clean-shaven suddenly  
he has swallowed his chin  
no longer wears glasses  
looks at me directly  
with plastic eyes  
that tear when he tries  
to see

Thinner

(Eat better since  
you left. Two vegetables  
per meal, no crumb cakes,  
New York delight, or apple  
crisp pudding)  
he runs every morning  
uphill against the wind  
the sun a steam-roller  
on his back

I can roll my fist  
in the hollow of his chest  
cup his hip bones in my hands  
Our ribs lock together

Not even this body  
is safe





8.

I will be the butterfly  
my pattern unrepeated  
Just one wing

I will light  
on the lined skin  
below his eye  
                    delicate  
as lost words we both  
remember

I will be beautiful  
because I won't be whole  
Unsuitable  
for glass or frame

Wind-stilled    wind-driven  
My second wing  
will be the sky



9.

The first morning  
I vacuum corners, watch addresses  
shrivel in fire, shine  
each spattered mirror  
He knows me  
by smell, the kitchen sounds,  
the bend of my body in sleep

And now I sleep more  
except at night when I stand  
at the southern window and listen  
to the panic of wings



10.

The dog will not come

sits in the corner, snarls

when I pass

Today as I lower her dish

she tries to bite me

clamps her teeth on my sleeve

hangs like a funeral bell

She remembers my leaving



11.

I will be  
the tongue of a bird  
curled in the cage  
of his hands  
                  singing





12.

I fold his t-shirts  
place them on his shelves  
The cotton is warm from the dryer  
stained from his mixing of colors  
The smell is clean  
like sheets of billowed snow

Today I unpack  
the last suitcase  
carry it hollow down  
the basement



13.

He warms the car  
scrapes frost in the dark mornings  
doesn't speak  
                    before breakfast

I toast the bread  
crack eggs into the oiled pan

Our snares of words  
no longer tighten or choke  
the air between us

Like wild creatures, we know  
when to circle approach  
downwind slow

We live in the comfort  
where night touches  
mute  
as wings of moths



LETTERS TO A DISTANT LOVER



". . . but that she was both fayre and good,  
and much was I beholdyn unto her, but she  
loved me oute of mesure."

-- Lancelot





## THIS ONE'S FOR YOU

Hey, big hummer,  
who can strut like you?  
Crotch-tight jeans, boots  
shiny as pool balls, heels  
pounding stars into pavement  
you call sky.

Hey, big rooster,  
who can cockadoodledo  
like you do? You raise the  
bloody sun from his corner  
your voice, brass  
bell in the ring.

Hey, prize fighter,  
who can fuck like you?  
Women howl your name,  
say no man will take  
your place, buzz them  
like an electric drill.  
You spin the world  
on the end of your cock.

Hey, big talker,  
waited all my life  
for a man like you.  
Come my way, I'll blow  
the fuses in your big machine,  
short all your circuits.  
I'll break the balls  
you rack on the table,  
I'll bust your pool cue.



## TONIGHT YOU TURN

Tonight you turn  
your glass upside down  
beer runs into my lap  
you throw the keys at me  
like money, fuck you,  
leave the bar and I  
finish my drink  
walk to the dark lot  
where you piss between cars

All the way home  
the wheel holds my shaking  
hands and suddenly you want  
to protect me  
lie on top  
press me into earth  
as if the sky spit stone  
and your broad back would break  
the pain

Above me you turn  
but not away. Is it here  
that it begins?



SO YOU SAY YOU ARE GOING AWAY

as you sleep, my love,  
my tongue darts  
down your chest, your belly  
presses my pigments  
into your skin

you will leave

but like a Tattoo Man  
carry my serpents  
awaken each night  
to the sound  
of their sedulous mating



## YET IN DREAMS OF DYING

your name I call  
I ride you  
through the night

I thought I shot you  
long ago, pushed you  
into the river  
but you keep rising,  
bobbing your dead  
eye

where are the fish  
that devour, the diving gull,  
the water that softens  
flesh

my dreams entangle me  
in your foaming mane  
come morning, I will drown





## MY NEW OLD MAN, HE'S SO GOOD

in bed, does tricks, can  
come on his head or  
swinging from the light  
enter me, a cork, Pop!  
fills me up  
or best when still  
I move over him  
my slippery skin, snake  
swallows mouse, he dies  
inside me often, I breathe  
him into life, lick him  
from darkness, his and mine  
or just the night



## LEAVING

I have grown old  
from leavings

this time  
should not matter  
I know the words the gestures  
as well as

the hairs  
in the dip of your back  
the white skin  
of your inner thigh  
the gnashing of your teeth  
as you grind the bones of night

but when you go  
so silently  
your shoulders balancing  
the shrinking sun  
your heels spinning  
the world away

my third eyelid drops  
dark spaces grow  
between my fingers



## NOVEMBER POEM

We have reached a white  
and vacant place. Boundaries  
disappear: the sky spills  
over the horizon  
fences are buried, the paths  
we broke through snow.  
Every bird we create  
flies from our palms,  
beats itself  
against the sky that betrays.

We have reached the end  
of all we have known.

    You are not the man  
    I dreamed into being  
    at the lake edge  
    man beside me  
    sun-warm  
    pants rolled up  
    as new-born catfish  
    swarmed around our feet  
    blessed our skin  
    with flicks  
    of their black tails

I am not the woman  
you fashioned with a lover's patience  
woman of softness and waiting.  
Stones I bring you from the fields  
are for killing, not for grinding  
corn to meal.



But there is no going back.  
We move from the open into trees  
where the breath of all the animals  
we have not seen  
hangs crystal in the frozen air.





## LETTER

Our first daughter  
with pinking shears cut out  
her mouth, stuck it on the mirror,  
a lipstick drawing, then spoke  
her death in blood. Our second daughter  
swallowed a word I had carved  
into a hook and died across the table  
spilling her wine on the white lace cloth.  
The youngest son sewed my love  
into his pockets and fell into the dead  
trees reaching from the river.  
I keep their baby teeth in jars, hand  
prints in books. All our children kill  
themselves, I write.



## IN DARKNESS I WATCH YOU

Later, when you sleep with another,  
tell her you have never loved  
like this, I'll remember tonight  
people sitting at your feet  
listening to words  
pulled through your fingers  
like touchstones  
worried to the shape of your thoughts

This is fear, you say,  
and this. This is loneliness;  
the dark stone, despair.  
The one never found is love.

In darkness I watch you. I touch  
the flower you bought in Old Montreal,  
stem tied around a button on my vest.  
Yellow petals turning brown, scent is  
the last thing to die.



## LET ME HAVE AN HONEST SADNESS

I am tired  
of the slow sadness  
that sits on my shoulders  
with the weight of memory

Let me have an honest sadness  
that breaks through skin  
like shoulder blades, sadness  
trailing blood over snow  
like a fox dragging its belly  
from the roar of the Arctic Cat,  
sadness that smashes  
with a lead pipe and hands  
of an old lover

not forgotten

Sadness that says

There is no place  
to escape the wind  
There is no room  
with unbroken panes  
no blanket to cover  
your head  
The sound in the bush is  
the animal  
There is no time for  
one last poem



## THIRD PERSON

you have become my  
lover  
and I must suffer  
your absences  
your emptiness in the mailbox cavern  
your silence in the phone's mouth

I think of you  
in the third person  
you are the he  
who is not here  
there is no you  
in my bed just a corpse  
legs and arms stiff as prick  
wordless flesh heavy on  
my chest that heaves  
to throw you (he) off  
but the body is too solid  
a finger in my cunt  
everynight no words  
just bruises  
shaped by me  
(or him)

you have become my lover  
heavy stiff (him) bearing down





## HANDS OF ABSENCE

the hands  
of my absence  
are touching you now

it is not the ghost  
of the woman who died  
in this house  
not the woman of bloodied sheets  
seeking revenge for betrayed love

my hands search only  
for presence

do not tremble  
they are not strong enough  
to strangle or bruise

they are just  
fingers of memory  
light and smooth  
on your white shoulder  
as you lie uncovered  
in sleep







## AFTER

tossing the sheet aside  
that covered words  
licking sweat  
from her upper lip  
she says

Poets cannot live  
together. Now, for instance,  
we wonder who will write  
the first poem  
about us.

sliding his fingers  
up and down her wet thighs  
he says

More important,  
whose poem will be better?



## REUNION

I fall into

the pattern of your loving  
follow your movements as the wing  
follows the mind  
of the bird

the warm silent places  
forget so easily remember





YOU

you are as perfect  
as my lover  
ought to be

that is

: the delight of your tongue  
splits the skin of berries  
against your teeth

: in your eyes I see  
a strike of fishes ring  
the brass sky

: a kingbird lights  
upon your finger cracks  
the seeds of night

you are as perfect  
as my lover  
ought to be

gather stripes  
from tiger lilies  
to build a cage  
that holds me



## WHEN ALL THE WORDS ARE LOST

When the wind lies  
along the branches by our window  
and only sparrows move,  
shake snow from folded wings,  
I listen for whispers.  
Your eyes dart beneath their lids  
as if your body were too small  
to hold this terror.

When the river is silenced  
I hold the smell  
you leave me  
when you turn away, watch  
you fall beyond the edge of fear  
and winter, into darkness  
that only you can name.

When all the words are lost  
my fingers touch your sleeping.  
I long to tell you:  
the river breaks,  
birds return and love  
is as possible as mountains.



DEATH WISH



who hath woe? who hath sorrow?  
who hath contentions? who hath babbling?  
who hath wounds without cause?  
who hath redness of eyes?

Proverbs 23:29





Give up words: a good knife, honed: and a needle  
drawn across an iron bar, set in a matchbox.

-- John Thompson



dead, dead, dead  
I've put a bullet  
through my head

I've used the blade  
the noose, the gun  
and still my dying's  
just begun



Before the poems, he says  
we were happy  
Now you look too closely  
You lift the corners  
of shadows. Before

we wore the same  
path into grasses  
Together we planted  
trees



he brought me gold  
from poplar, red-wax  
berries to string  
around my neck

I spread my arms  
bark seals my mouth  
crows fly away  
with the blossoms  
of my eyes





I have lost my mind

look for it  
under the corners of shadows  
check hospital lists  
phone the police  
who ask for facts

it is

: as large as the navel's  
eye

: as old as the swallow's  
circle

: blue is woman is imagination

Reward Offered:

I will give you children  
that look like you  
and I'll forget the sound  
of naming



we argue again

with the cold wire of logic  
he slices into my head  
a mirror of words  
hiding his face

I break open  
my veins  
with shards of glass  
say, look  
see what I am



looking in looking in-  
side, the eye of the needle,

the knife searches the gut  
red organs spill from

the cave of flesh, glisten  
like new snakes in the sun

and do we know and is there time  
to know before our muscles

kick one last time, before  
the mind is nothing, a stone

at the bottom of darkness, never  
split open for its bright thunder



On the weekend my friends visit me.  
We wear each other's words like skin.  
He is on the outside.  
Tells them once I made bread.  
Now I burn things.  
They will grow hungry this weekend.  
But he has bought doughnuts from the bakery.  
Perhaps with a little cheese . . .

They say: You must get out of here.





(I have seen his death  
many times

the wheel wrenched from his hands  
his head breaking the windshield  
the slap of his flesh on pavement  
a gathering of crows

I am a charming widow  
blacken my nails and eyelids  
on each death petal  
inscribe misery

the mortician will taste my sorrow  
as I choose the coffin  
the minister lift my skirt  
on the rise of the grave  
the lawyer kiss my breasts  
while I read the will

Rest in peace my love)



Strands of barbed wire  
taut between us, tufted with  
clumps of hair. On one fencepost  
sits the hawk, its eyes and talons  
filed to the hunter's points,  
waiting for the quick  
movement in the grass.



At night I feign sleep, say: My brain is knotted,  
turning in my head like a grinding wheel. I am  
pinned to its spinning centre. I must sleep.

He is considerate.

Spills his semen in the shower, the water small hands.  
I bend around his back, liking his touch outside of  
me, his warmth, the fine hairs on the backs of his  
legs.



We watch cold stars  
through his telescope  
The double stars are one  
from our distance. He splits  
them with his mirror, makes  
two from one  
on the bear's tail





Method:

wind the rope  
through the folds of my neck  
throw it over the branch  
my kicking feet shatter  
the shining air and the sky  
explodes its red  
stars in my head

a black widow, I hang  
from a wind-strung thread  
in the dark hollow  
behind his eyes



Clouds on the horizon are peaked like mountains; the  
sunset spills on stubble. With my woman's hands I  
scrub it clean, cleanse the stain of dying.



one day the world will invert  
the clouds become snow drifts  
hard enough to hold a woman  
without her breaking  
through

soon I will step from the roof  
and walk



Dust builds between the windowpanes. Every  
Saturday I vacuum them, graveyard of flies.  
The wind sands the glass, makes windows breathe  
in, breathe out, distorting reflections, faces  
mirrored in the night.





tonight I dream  
of hawks circling  
I catch their falling  
feathers to camouflage  
my skull

lower they swoop  
their golden eyes sun-  
spikes nailed above  
pointed beaks

I am one of them  
fly in the wing's rush  
to the sun's pounding  
heart

when they land  
they are people  
hanging awkward from branches  
                  dropping  
                  broken  
on roots gnarled in stone



make this food holy  
this song holy  
this body holy  
make it dance a moth-  
dance with its powdery bones



Bird feathers.

The muted grey of horned larks.

The yellow of a meadowlark's breast.

My beautiful cats--

they've even eaten the wings,

my cats, they've eaten the wind.



Method:

Drive to the curve above the riverbed. Push the pedal to the floor, the hand inside the jeans. Drive this orgasm over the edge, the blood rush exploding like glass.





Run this pain down

Beat it

with the flat of your feet

Break it

with the flint of your hand

Run this pain

down



Once I made bread: The smell of yeast blossoming in  
sugar water, the dough pliable under my palms, kneading,  
patting, pushing the dough flat with the heels of my  
hands, scooping fingers through butter, polishing the  
smooth brown with yellow.

After the bread comes crusted and hot from the oven,  
I cut him a slice,

the steam escapes like pain



Method:

only debtors sink  
deliberate as stone  
into the river

arms of lovers  
dragged from the mud bottom  
are peeled of skin  
hands scraped raw  
from one last effort  
to grip the railings  
as they lept  
the weight of pain  
lightening when they fall

if my finger remains  
hooked on the metal balustrade  
wrap it in the hair of night  
and place it under your pillow

it will bring you dreams



my clothes are crusted  
with food  
my teeth are growing  
skin

my hair smells strong  
like an animal's hide

no wonder he unwinds  
from my hands

a paper bird  
flaming towards the sun





tonight he starts a fire  
to dry my hair

I want to curl  
in the lick of flame  
in the owl-down ash  
soft as the skin of eyes

my bones burnt pure my flesh a fire my eyes blacker  
than dead stars

sprinkle me into an early wind  
look for me  
drifting down  
touching rose berries with  
gentle frost



My friends say come and live with us. The flat above our house. Now there are two French Canadians. We want them to leave. They make too much noise. Floorboards squeaking, furniture banging. Always fucking. We like you. Come. Plant a garden in our yard, between the lilac bushes.



still the dying  
naked in public  
open your mouth  
say  
ahhhh



Plan a winter death:

walk into waves of snow  
lie like an ancient shell  
filling with the sound of

sink into wind ripples  
curve of the body  
snow  
falling





Plan a wind death:

on the highest hill  
where grasses bend  
in one direction  
I swallow the  
rain-slicked wind

it surges down my throat  
thrashes my voice until  
there are no words  
to tell of pain

dying inside out

the wind my fiercest cancer



looking in and looking  
the knife searches  
glistens  
and do we know  
                    and is there  
time



Taste the pistol's steel:

my tongue sticks  
to cold metal

I squeeze the trigger  
splatter my empty mouth  
on the kitchen wall

a crimson pattern  
of words

never said



I feel guilt for everything. I have not cleaned the house, have not made supper, have not walked the dog

Have not loved well or enough

Have not put the candle in the window

Have not wiped the dust from his eyes

Have not touched his perfect bones

or dried his wounds with my hair





blood in the mouth, the blood-  
worm crawls behind the eyes  
no words, just blood and a thin  
bone name that snaps between  
fingers, broken  
wish



wash dishes

wash clothes

wash floor

wash hair

wash hands

wash away

wash away

wash away



Listen to

the shape of my hands  
the voice in my wrists

Break through my skin  
find me whole  
drag me

free



plant a dead tree  
on my grave  
branches stripped  
to hold a crow's  
murder, sharp tongue  
crazing the sky  
with thin black  
lines of death





I will leave  
the taste of earth  
in your sleeping mouth  
the print of my tongue  
on each closed eye

my darling, teach me how  
to die



HUMANS AND OTHER BEASTS



Mother was an ape, I don't know  
who my father was.

-- Tarzan



## ANIMALS OF WINTER

The animals move with snow  
past the tree-line, the wood-pile, up  
to the house. White, silent as frost they lie  
under the window, listen to the warm  
sounds of your sleeping. By morning  
you think they have faded to dreams;  
you scrape night from the window.  
They stretch on the doorstep like dogs.  
After years of wandering they have returned  
through ice and hunger to this place  
where memory is smell and the sound  
of your footsteps behind the grey walls.  
When you look closely, their skin encloses  
an emptiness larger than hunger and you  
circle inside their eyes.





## COASTAL MAN

He tells me  
he is afraid of oceans  
built his house on the cliff  
Trees cage him from  
the waves' gleam, the women  
washed ashore from his past  
like dying whales too large  
for his sorrow to contain  
And all his children playing  
in the sand are drawn each day  
closer to the water's lure

Inland he hears their cries  
(the women the children)  
imagines the shrieks of gulls  
diving for heads  
fishermen toss into the sea

Inland he tells me  
bears snuffle around his window  
gouge his door  
Once his screen was torn  
and a huge snout pushed through  
He knows they will get him  
drag him from his bed  
over the forest floor the rocks  
bleeding to the ocean  
where all will fall upon him  
savage gulls



## OD MAKES A JOURNEY WEST

Od wears a Calgary stetson  
tall snoot boots, rents  
a purple van

Just out of Moose Jaw  
double highway thinning West  
Od spots a figure on the shoulder  
The hand holds a tape recorder  
waves a microphone  
to bring him down  
Od fascinated by captured sound  
pulls back on the steering wheel  
eases his bucking van  
to a stop

It is a woman,  
ear phone plugged in  
a poncho concealing her symmetry

What are you doing, Od cries  
as she sinks into the seat  
beside him

Listening to my voice  
she sighs It's the only way  
to learn my rhythms  
She places a wire in her other ear  
What's your name Od shouts  
into the microphone  
Call me Ode to...

Od is pleased by her grammar  
and the width of her feet  
propped on the dashboard



Here is a lady to balance  
on my bars

Here is one  
who can jump on the double  
jump so high

Take me to the sea

she breathes  
I must find shells to shod these feet  
I must walk on the ocean find the union  
of sky and water

Od waves his hat in one hand  
kicks the gas pedal  
with the heel of his boot  
rides straight into the dusty sun



## SCULPTRESS

(for Gladys)

She is too strong  
for any man  
to love her

She is not soft  
under the pumping body  
every bone breaks  
the surface like leaping fish  
reminding him that below  
the calm skin is another  
darkness a different light

Nor does she close her eyes  
but watches his every  
movement the inside  
of his mouth as he shouts  
his coming

Only in the grey light  
fingering through the shutters  
will she sleep and he follows  
the outline of her body  
like the tombstone marble  
she carves a shape so pure  
so beautiful  
that he forgets  
to look for his name





## THE MAGICIAN

When the magician left, he forgot  
to join the sawed woman, The upper-half  
asleep in her box, did not see him go.  
But when she awoke, she knew--  
all the rabbits had disappeared,  
his cape had been pulled  
from the laundry basket  
and the house was clear of smoke.

For days her head screamed,  
her legs kicked the box, but no one came.  
The neighbours had heard goings-on in  
that place before and he had fooled them  
more than once.

When the magician remembered,  
he cancelled his travelling band and returned  
home. The lower box was empty, but the eyes in  
the head opened and the woman said, "It's too  
late now. I've found a rat for a lover.  
He's eaten my dainties, my most delicate  
bits. When he has swallowed my tongue,  
we'll sing you the song of bone. The wind,  
my rat lover, and me."

The magician buried her head in the yard  
and covered her grave with stones, but stones  
couldn't hold down the wind or still the rat  
scuttling along the darkness above his head.



WRITER

you've gotta ask yourself  
why you're in it

take tonight, for instance  
the party after the reading  
went into the kitchen  
to get a beer  
the professor's wife  
she gives me a blow job  
right there in front of  
the fridge

words pull them in  
soft and big-eyed at your feet  
they want your tongue  
inside their mouths, your cock  
immortalizing their cunts  
in your greatest poem

you've gotta ask



## SOUTH OF MOOSE JAW

"Tom, a crazy man,  
 walked all the way  
 from Minnesota,  
 carried his life on his back"  
 (up and left his wife and children)

tall Nordic man  
 a carpenter's apron  
 big hands hanging  
 like small animals  
 bound to his wrists

"Neighbours wouldn't believe  
 he'd build that damn boat  
 till the C.P.R. unloaded  
 engine parts and Tom began  
 to forge his tools"

pliers and hammer  
 hacked out of iron  
 on the display case  
 a water clock  
 circles time

Letters on cardboard label:

Pliers Hammer Clock

"Even made his own steel teeth  
 a machine for puffing wheat  
 and a violin"

"Tom, a crazy man,  
 at 50 flew his coop/ built his boat  
 at 60 tried to drag it/ with a horse  
 and his back across



this bugger of a prairie  
to the river to the ocean"

Picture:  
the hull hunched in  
spring snow gullied with dirt  
dim man leaning in doorway

"Tom, the crazy man,  
the boat killed him  
the boat broke him"

Tom, strength of three men,  
coffined  
legs and hands and wide back  
set deep into dirt beside the boat  
a sign nailed to the hollow hull--

"Monument of Labour  
To All Early Pioneers  
To Whom We Owe So Much"

Boat and man uprooted  
displayed his grave marked  
by two white slats crossed  
by a cardboard label tacked to the centre

TOM SUKANEN

Five feet too deep  
for the Saskatchewan River  
the keel sinks into grass





## GAME FARM

1.

the polar bears are not  
white as Arctic snow  
but yellowed like old sheets

they trudge pigeon-toed  
around their circular pool  
around the piles of stones  
the Goodyear tires

a worker in a red hat  
tosses day-old buns  
to the polar bears  
they open yawning mouths  
swallow lazily  
flop loose sacks of flesh  
on their cement shore

2.

Tribute to the Timber Wolf  
the sign says

and yes

there they are  
a pack of legends only a fence away  
The Timber Wolves: fat and lazy  
old dogs

a huge male  
grey as early mist  
stretches himself upright, walks  
the length of his kennel  
feet sore and swollen  
nails click on the hard earth



a black wolf  
opens his eyes once  
a yellow fire rages in his massive head  
then the eyelids droop  
and he disappears  
becomes a dog again  
lolling at the feet of children  
who throw the ends of weiners  
over the fence

3.  
some click their cameras  
others growl or bark  
wanting these animals  
to do something  
(after all, we paid our money)

even the tiger lies  
like a tattered rug  
and licks one striped paw gently

the snowy owls  
sitting on their straw bales  
don't respond to hoots  
or fingers poked through  
don't even try to bite

their eyes black holes  
in the white heads  
perhaps they don't see us  
perhaps they dream of trees  
and moons to balance on  
or glide silently above our heads  
the feathery snow falling  
with each sweep of their wings  
the snow covering the straw



filling in the paw tracks  
shrouding the polar bears  
in the cold white dream



## MOTHER WAS A LOVELY BEAST

mother was a lovely beast  
she gave to me a lovely feast  
three teats hanging from her chest  
I found the third one quite the best

a coarse black beard grew from her chin  
she worried it was due to sin  
but she was good and she was kind  
and father didn't seem to mind

with three tits you can suckle three  
and still leave room enough for me  
besides you're quiet as a flower  
a wife's tongue makes a marriage sour

he stroked her beard as she stroked his  
they lived a life of total bliss  
till people came from field and town  
to see my mother's chest and down

so father built a stage for her  
to bare her breasts and show her fur  
he tried to teach her how to scowl  
to walk on fours, to moan and growl

she sat on stage head-bowed, alone  
while father bought a megaphone  
The Bearded Venus he would say  
A Woman -- and he'd make them pay

still mother uttered not a sound  
but when my father went uptown





she raised her skirts to show her hair  
and let men mount her like a mare

mother was a lovely beast  
she gave to me a lovely feast  
three teats hanging from her chest  
I found the third one quite the best



ANDY AND GEORGE, FRIENDS

(for David Arnason)

Last night they came to visit,  
talked of women who dance  
with balding men, wiggle  
their asses to attract  
those who sit  
backs to the wall.

These new women  
want to be blessed  
with blood. They want men  
who put their balls in glass  
cases on display.

The other talked of rape,  
men who turn  
icons to the wall,  
hold boiling water  
above the woman's face  
until she opens. A fantasy  
for a film about the prairie.

This morning my lover and I  
walk to the river to see the eclipse,  
the last of this century, the last  
before we die. We hold hands, watch  
the joining of sun and moon,  
whisper This is holy.  
A bat, thinking it is night,  
stumbles into the sky.



NO LONGER TWC PEOPLE



Poems by Lorna Uher

With my fist I stroke you  
I could have told you long ago  
Geese wedge into sky  
You're so covered with scars  
Legs joined  
Everything that wants to live  
You demand me be gentle  
The dream enfolds you  
Now is the still and rotting time

Poems by Patrick Lane

The space between my ribs  
You have always driven into silence  
We have only begun our seasons  
Behind your face  
We have begun to bury ourselves  
Beneath your skirts  
You have never learned  
Out of mountains  
Now is the time for patience





No Longer Two People is a sequence of poems that explores the male and female visions. The poems were written alternately-- I began the sequence, Patrick responded, I responded to his response and so on. The images happened spontaneously as did the stance taken by the two personae.

I believe this sequence is an important section of my thesis because the rest of the manuscript was written out of a female voice. Here I have a chance to expand that voice by responding to a male viewpoint. As a result, there are two parallel tracks that can be defined as male/female or anima/animus that touch, withdraw, attack and come together.

The title defines what we were trying to do. Although the poems begin in the personal, they hopefully move beyond the two writers into the whole of humanity. The woman is all women; the man, all men. Thus the poems include both the individual and the archetypal.

As a form, the poem points to another direction for the sequence poem. The line and stanza length, the rhythms and structures were shared not only by the content, but also by the emotions evoked by the previous poem and by the style of the other writer. This influence of the other produced the energy that moves the poem from its initial anger and frustration to the final patience at the end.



"Though these two people once existed for me, they exist no longer. The 'vision' of them gave me a preliminary emotion; then little by little their actual presences became blurred; they developed into a fiction and then disappeared altogether, or rather they were transformed into all kinds of problems. They are no longer two people, you see, but forms and colours; forms and colours that have taken on, meanwhile, the idea of two people and preserve the vibration of their life."

-- Pablo Picasso



1.

With my fist  
I stroke you  
never the open  
palm but knuckles  
skin drawn tight  
bone over bone your ribs  
so many the spaces between  
the spaces

I net and renet but  
the real fish slip through  
only dreams are caught  
delicate as language  
  hooked  
so sluggish  
in their writhing

2.

I pour your coffee  
down the drain  
Violence, you push me  
to violence, you say  
Why do you want  
the animal in me?

I burn your poems  
scatter the ashes over your toast  
wait for you to split me  
in two like the flat fish  
fashioned into sky



Instead you must talk  
explain my perversions  
ask: What do you want?

I want  
to feel my fist  
push through  
to the cries that were  
before words

I want to swallow you  
like the great whale  
carry you in my sea where  
no language will bring a birth  
only the fire that burns  
in your fingers, the cock  
that pins my dying tongue





The space  
between my ribs contains  
only a loss. As a child  
I dreamed the story of the  
mother made from me  
and lying alone in bed  
counted my cage of bone  
the stolen life.

In that turning wheel  
called darkness  
where dreams, impossible  
as fish, swim below  
the hunched carapace  
that is the sky,  
I swim, endlessly  
imagining my escape.

The image of the heron  
holds my mind. Always  
in the distance I see  
the great brown stumps  
of her legs. Her patience  
as she waits for my arrival  
is the reptile's dance  
the eyes that still me  
into death where every  
escape is a return  
an endless entering  
where I swim milk-white  
among the clustered eggs.



I could have told you long ago  
you would not find the perfect word  
even though you carved it  
out of pain and bone  
during your last starvation.

In your search beyond  
warmth and touching, your eyes broke  
in the great ice-fields. The vision  
a whiteness: wings and voices turned  
to snow, and the sky swallowed  
the land you walked on  
your feet breaking through  
like stones everything breaking

Now you have returned, old and tired  
upon my doorstep. A winter man  
softened by frost. Blind,  
you must touch to find your way.  
It is too late for me  
to lead you into light. I could have  
told you long ago  
You would not find the perfect word  
though you carved it  
out of pain and bone.



You have always driven into silence  
planted trees to shelter you  
on that prairie that made you  
naked. Everything is

measured in space. The outland  
that made you care. I seed  
as the land is bred, see you  
chapped and bleeding, walking

into wind as if that silence was  
enough. The man I am tears leaves,  
strips wood through winter  
into spring, leaving only enough

to breed the dead. Caragana, lilac,  
belts of shelter you create  
to call a home. Naked you come  
to silence but when the wind dies

you turn to dreams of rain. Old  
wife, old house, old darkness:  
as that woman who walks into  
the west, dark as memory is, black

with clothing and wrinkles, without  
fear, without anything a man could call  
love. You go this way, woman, waiting  
like a bird wandered onto the prairie

without wings, demanding nothing  
but the roots you call claws  
curled into earth, your beak  
an opening that kills.



Geese wedge into sky  
split the hollow in two.  
Waves fragment the sun  
and leaves, once supple in spring,  
break.

I hold your trembling as wind  
rattles your tongue:  
how to go on, how to...  
go on. The sound of the door  
closing is the final note of pain.  
This autumn everything is breaking.

And geese wing into silence  
away from the cold that crawls  
towards us, levelling mountain  
into prairie. Our fear lies  
in recognition. For once the thing is  
named, it will not leave  
but hang around your neck  
like every bird you killed  
and track my scent like every wound  
I left behind in snow.





We have only begun our seasons.  
The time of naming. A thing  
crawls inside me, sluggish,  
cold as snakes are among stones.  
I have opened myself  
for the last time. A door  
is two visions. My hands  
tear at the flesh of my belly  
and I fold into the wound,  
search for the lost  
among organs that demand  
a life.

    You will find me  
like this when you return:  
back broken, and the flesh  
zippered with needles,  
black stitches  
tracks of missing birds.



You're so covered with scars  
you forget where they come from.  
Like birds they sing to the wounded  
who descend from the railings of bridges  
to follow you. In bars the cripples limp  
to your table, drag their bleeding casts  
towards the criss-cross of your face.  
The old sit beside you in stations,  
cough their lives into your lap. And now  
I have crawled from under your bed to lie  
against you. I trace the braille of your body:  
the broken lip, the hole in the side  
of your face. But you are emptied of stories.  
Instead you press into my skin. The scars  
cover me like feathers.



Behind your face a fish swims  
covered with pale feathers.  
At night when you lie  
sleeping among the green  
dreams your body calls love  
I lift your eyelids, watch  
his wandering among the white  
rivers of your mind.



Legs joined, you rise from  
our bed of sand and bump  
your nose against the walls.  
You allow yourself  
no tail, intricate  
as oriental fans, no neon glow.  
You are muddy, cold and hard  
shaped for the thrust  
to your own reflection.

Grown huge and grotesque, I  
watch you through the glass. In spite  
of your beautiful leaping  
you lack the strength to break  
the surface, It would be easy  
to scoop you up  
allow you arms and thighs  
or fashion wings from my hair  
to give you the grace of birds  
for you have made me  
in command of this dream.

But dreams are slippery as fish  
and if I draw you from the water,  
I might crush you between my fingers  
or you might leap from the net  
to swim your mad circles in my eye.





We have begun to bury ourselves.  
Each day we emerge more slowly,  
look at the trees as they strip  
themselves for winter. The sky is  
filled with falling and everything  
that wants to live escapes:  
geese, wild wedges burning south,  
the swarms of teal,  
black scars cut into clouds.

In dark rooms we find our corners,  
collect the books and papers  
that are someone else's dream.  
Prepare for sleep. This season  
is as hard as white, the pure bodies  
we have thought ourselves into being.  
Closing we give each other  
the little deaths, afraid of sound,  
afraid of the silence that devours.

It is almost never morning. The sun  
escapes and night surrounds  
us like an ancient wound. It is the time  
for rituals, the time of corn and gourds,  
locks of hair, the bones of birds.  
Trees like broken fingers reach  
awkwardly into the sky they hate  
and cold, that broken lidless eye  
stares down from the perfect north.

We wish for scabs. We want to be  
inside where trees of blood  
hide among the scars, the flesh



that calls us human. We break,  
tear at our skin and watch the red  
burn as it searches among  
the forests of hair, black trails  
reaching for our fingers, the maps  
of our living left behind.



Everything that wants to live  
escapes. The snap of your suitcase,  
the closing door.  
Winter is too harsh out here, you say.  
It closes like a fist around the body  
and I, a thin man, so easily break.

Everything creates its own  
escape. Leaves sink into earth;  
teal drive their hunger south.  
Still, the geese behind our house, fattened  
by children and old men who skip  
flat stones with thin blue wrists,  
stay the fall. The circles they swim  
around the sun and the hunter's moon  
begin to shrink. At night the cold stalks  
until they are snared in ice  
a perfect stillness  
in the pale and crystal dawn.



Beneath your skirts every man  
you have ever known  
hangs flayed from the hooks  
you call your love. Shrunk  
to the size of hummingbirds  
their plucked bodies smile  
loosely like skin bags  
whose mouths are openings  
without sound. I break you,  
tear apart the webbed sex  
and rise within, huge  
in your empty. Beneath me  
you move in a sea of sweat  
shaking with violence. The words,  
the songs, the rituals, the  
death repeated endlessly. Woman  
dead three thousand years,  
your life can no longer be  
called love. You are  
the mask, hunter.





You demand me be gentle  
but cannot see  
the softness that is  
there. Look, my teeth are  
falling out; my fists blossom  
into fingers and feathers  
grow from under my nails.  
When you lie with me  
you sink into a swell of flesh  
soft as snow.

You must cage all your birds  
split their tongues for singing  
but everything you are  
afraid to call love  
nests under my skirts  
where each season is a smell  
and wings too delicate and wild  
for your blunt fingers, their clumsy taming  
brush my thighs.



1.

You have never learned  
the meaning of the word  
gentleness: tell me  
you will kill me  
for poems. My death  
will be by your hand,  
the instrument you speak  
with. Every age of you  
is death. I have seen  
your future, black,  
birdlike, riding buses  
into the heart of the city  
where you weave your  
tapestry with names  
of the past, each one  
a perfect word, sewn  
like icons, every mouth  
closed by the claw  
that holds your needles.

2.

I was never afraid of love,  
the images you curl in  
when you lie. Woman,  
the secrets of your hell  
are only beginning to move  
to the surface; broken teeth  
cut through your skin,  
flay me as I sink into  
the burned feathers  
you call a body. This is  
the name of fear.  
It turns me to mountains  
where I create word, the  
wall you rage against.



Face called despair, face  
of masks, of vacant staring,  
your images are eyes, mouths  
black and open in the night.  
I know the children  
who burned in your brass mouth  
the men with genitals slit  
who bled to death  
on the steps of your temple  
calling out your name.



The dream enfolds you  
in a softness you had long ago  
forgotten.

Soon you can't remember  
your enemy's face, the brass mouth,  
the devouring eye, the wound that closes  
like a flower around your ecstasy.  
You were prepared for knives  
not the touch of fingers,  
for teeth instead of tonguing.

Let me call you still-hunter;  
silent as the hawk's fall  
you wait in moist shadow  
until moss grows between your legs  
and wasps hang a nest from your rifle.





Out of mountains, out of cold stone  
I have fashioned a word  
that will destroy you, hunter woman.  
You who wear the skins of birds,  
who decorate your dark breasts  
with the skulls of snakes,  
the fragile clicking bones  
whose song is crow.

Out of mountains, out of cold passes  
I have fashioned a word  
that will claim your shadow,  
that will climb through your skin  
and enter your heart.  
I will cast this word in stone.  
I will cast this word in sand.  
I will cast word in earth  
where your power hides trembling.

Your body will fall, hunter woman.  
Your voice will be silence, hunter woman.  
Your song will be dust.

Out of cold, out of the distant mountains  
I have come with a word  
that will destroy you, hunter woman,  
and when you are silence  
I will reach into your death  
and with my spittle  
I will fashion from your dust  
a word that is not a word  
and I will take you back to my mountain  
and speak you into life.



Now is the still  
and rotting time. Tomatoes suspend  
in green from the blackened vine.  
Carcasses lie exposed  
like lovers in the sun.

And we await  
the forgiveness of winter: drifts  
to bury all the dead we left behind.

Then we will come to one another  
with the simplicity of trees  
stripped branches holding all  
that will survive.



Now is the time  
for patience. All the animals are fallen,  
the birds escaped. Furrows, black ruts,  
wrinkle the face of the earth.  
Only the bound remain, rotting potatoes,  
the curled black vines where tomatoes hang  
shrivelled by frost.

There is no forgiveness,  
only a blind woman calling out her dead,  
the snow, the broken earth.

Alone at night  
I look down upon your sleeping,  
hear the unborn crying for release.  
Castrate, stripped of seed, I break  
a trail through the snow.  
There is no looking behind.  
Everywhere the wind covers my passing.













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